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3 Book REVIEW

# BREAKING WITH MOSCOW

*By Arkady N. Shevchenko.*
*378 pp. New York:*
*Alfred A. Knopf. $18.95.*

By Leslie H. Gelb

THE devastating condemnations of the Soviet system and leaders aside, the self-serving explanations and contradictions notwithstanding, there is a vitally important thrust to "Breaking With Moscow," a memoir by the highest-level Soviet official ever to defect to the West. It is that "what Soviet leaders want above all is to avoid the risk of nuclear catastrophe." And "like it or not," the two superpowers can and should "seek reasonable and practical accommodation, even cooperation where our interests are in alignment."

For 20 years, Arkady N. Shevchenko was where no other defector or spy has been — attending meetings of the Politburo, the ruling leadership of the Communist Party, working in the offices of Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko, and serving as the senior Russian official at the United Nations, where he had access to some of his Government's most sensitive cable traffic. He made known his intention to defect in 1975 and — after some soul searching — became a spy for the United States the following year. In April 1978, he defected. His account of his final days in Soviet harness, by the way, reads like a not too bad spy thriller. He now lives, more or less openly, in the Washington area, writing and lecturing for a living. Perhaps most important, State Department officials often consult him.

Here and there, Mr. Shevchenko offers some gems of history. For example, the Cuban leader Fidel Castro and *not* Soviet leaders came up with the idea of sending Cuban troops to Angola in 1975. His anecdotes are replete with confirmations of Western fears of Soviet leaders as power-hungary liars and cheats, yet as very cautious men. His inside portraits of those gray men — for example, Mr. Gromyko as the prime advocate of improving relations with Washington — are often revealing and important.

But are the accounts true? Can we count on him? Is he telling more than he knows or less? Are there hidden motives somewhere? It is critical to have some sense of this. For if the central message of this book is reliable, it means the United States can work and resolve differences with the Soviet Union — as long as our leaders are hardheaded and realistic about this formidable and implacable adversary.

If reliable, this would constitute the first piece of evidence, not proof or speculation, that goes to the heart of the American debate about the motives and calculations of Soviet leaders. Foreign policy debates, usually very murky, often turn on just such matters.

What do we know of the man that would shed light on his testimony? From his own story, both published and from other accounts, Arkady Shevchenko had made it. He was a member of the Soviet *nomenklatura* or elite. Born in the Ukraine on Oct. 11, 1930, he attended the best universities and training grounds for the Soviet elite and joined the Foreign Ministry in 1956. From 1970 to 1973, he served on Mr. Gromyko's personal staff. Before and after that, he worked at the United Nations. From 1973 until his defection, he was an Under Secretary General of that body, the top job for a Soviet official there. The book largely follows this chronology.

His access to military information and K.G.B. state security intelligence was quite limited. He does not pretend otherwise and acknowledges the paranoid compartmentalization of information within the Soviet system. He was not a senior Party member or policy maker. But there can be little doubt that his access to hard foreign policy information and gossip was broader and more intimate than anything we have had before, including his being present at several Polituro meetings and working directly with Soviet leaders such as Nikita S. Khrushchev and Leonid I. Brezhnev. The Russian who came closest to him in providing valuable information was Col. Oleg Penkovsky, a military intelligence officer who provided us with critical information about the meager Russian missile capabilities before the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.

On the face of things, then, he is a knowledgeable witness. Fascinatingly, however, the testimony he offers is different from the rest of what might be called "defector literature." This literature has generally portrayed Soviet leaders and elites as selfish, bloodthirsty, power-mad, one-dimensional, single-minded monsters beyond redemption. Mr. Shevchenko's sociology is all this, yet less. It is more nuanced, complicated, defensive and contradictory — touchstones of reality. His people are not only hunters, but the hunted and the trapped, caught in the vice of hypocrisy where life conflicts with ideology and "current truths." It is, thus, the kind of book with something for almost all schools of thought about the Soviet Union — except the far left.

American hard-liners and conservatives will be able to pick a few choice cherries, for example on the issue of cheating on arms-control treaties. In 1972, Moscow signed a treaty aimed at destroying biological weapons, except for research on defense. That spring, Mr. Shevchenko says, a general told him that Defense Minister Andrei Grechko had instructed the military to continue producing these weapons. "It was not possible that the Politburo was unaware of this order," he comments.

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Also along these lines he points out that Soviet policy toward Europe is aimed at encouraging neutralist and pacifist sentiments in West Germany; the United Nations is used simply as a "propaganda" forum; and to the Kremlin, American military power "is the main, if not only, barrier to to their plans for world domination."

But as he discusses the détente policy that flourished between Moscow and Washington during the Nixon Administration, complexities appear, and he begins to contradict himself. Thus, he writes of détente that "Soviet leaders told the West repeatedly what it wanted to hear and lulled many into believing it." But then, he also writes that just as "Richard Nixon oversold the prospective benefits of détente, so did his Kremlin counterparts."

He also quotes Brezhnev as saying in 1976 that "Détente does not in the slightest abolish, nor can it abolish or alter, the laws of the class struggle." He goes on to stress Moscow's "confidence" that "victory will come in the course of human developments," and that Soviet leaders in this regard are "deeply ideological." And yet his book is suffused with statements about the meaninglessness of ideology in Soviet life and thinking except as a charade. He cannot seem to decide when and if it means everything or nothing or something.

His discussion of the strategic nuclear arms talks, so central to détente, gives weight to the middle-ground analysts of Soviet behavior. While Moscow sought to use the SALT I and II arms control treaties, signed in the 1970's, to "restrain" American military programs and "narrow" the gap with Washington, there was a good deal of opposition to these treaties within the Soviet hierarchy itself. He also describes the process as "a search for an appropriate strategic balance," and emphasizes that Moscow was seeking "parity," while fearing the costs of competition with a technologically superior America.

Then, in one of the most extraordinary passages in the book, he writes that Mr. Gromyko "hoped to bring the Soviet armed forces command around to thinking in terms of limiting weaponry, not just acquiring more." He quotes Mr. Gromyko as telling him: "It's hard to discuss the subject with the military. But the more they know, the more contact they have with the Americans, the easier it will be to turn our soldiers into something more than just martinets." He consistently paints Mr. Gromyko — along with Brezhnev and often Khrushchev as well — as steady advocates of treating the United States as "both adversary and partner." This view contrasts sharply with the standard State Department depiction of Mr. Gromyko as a key hawk. Indeed, Mr. Gromyko, the Foreign Ministry, and most of the Politburo are often seen in the Shevchenko book as urging caution in foreign policy against arguments to the contrary from the military and the highly ideological staff of the Communist Party Central Committee.

With the principal exception of Khrushchev's adventurism in trying to deploy missiles in Cuba, a very unpopular move in the Kremlin, caution is the byword. He states that Moscow warned President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt against starting war in 1967 against Israel, and opposed President Anwar el-Sadat's doing so in 1973. Moreover, he portrays Moscow as hesitant about military involvement in Africa, but pressed to do so by Fidel Castro in Angola in 1975 and pushed to do so in general by competition with China for leadership of national liberation movements. As for the Russians getting involved in the Horn of Africa in 1977 in clashes between Somalia and Ethiopia, this was something Moscow seriously sought to avoid out of political self-interest. In the end, Moscow chose to support Ethiopia because it was the more important of the two countries and because the continuing war there forced a choice on the Soviet leaders. This Soviet move became the sword in the hands of American hard-liners.

Withal, there is a lingering feeling that as much as Mr. Shevchenko tells, he is holding things back. Perhaps it is for another book. Perhaps American intelligence officials asked him not to mention certain matters in any detail. That way Moscow cannot be sure of what our Government now knows. Yet, the reader yearns for more. The most detail Mr. Shevchenko provides is about himself as spy and husband. He apparently turned a great deal of information over to the American Government. By his own testimony, he told his wife practically nothing about his thoughts and plans for fear, he says, that she would choose family and creature comforts and turn him in to the K.G.B. Soon after he defects, Soviet officials hustle her back to the Soviet Union. Shortly thereafter, there is a news story saying that she has committed suicide. One gets a melancholy feeling from reading this part of the Shevchenko story.

In the end, one also gets the feeling that the author is telling the truth in this book, but not enough of it. □